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SUBJECT: DIYALA PRT: EDUCATION SYSTEM UPDATE

11. (U) This is a Diyala PRT reporting cable.

#### Summary

12. (U) The education system in Diyala continues to face severe challenges. Pre-OIF infrastructure shortcomings combined with the effects of recent kinetic activity in the province and general neglect have left only a skeleton of a school system in place. The PRT, other Coalition Force (CF) units, a dedicated Provincial Director General of Education (PDGE), Jaafar Maan Faris, and an enthusiastic Provincial Council Education Committee (PCEC) are coordinating closely to de-conflict efforts to repair and supply schools throughout the province. The office of the PDGE is unable to ascertain the extent of recent damage or current needs. The inability to provide even basic data highlights the severity of the crisis. PRT efforts to work with the PDGE and the PCEC and CF units in repairing schools have been successful but the job is far from done. Lack of security is a major consideration impairing the improvement of the education system in Diyala. End Summary.

#### Best Statistics Available

13. (U) Reports published in an Iraqi newspaper in September 2006 provide the most current picture of Diyala's education system. In 2006, there were reportedly 354,000 students attending 1,125 schools. The student population encompassed 31 kindergartens, 767 primary schools, 307 intermediate and secondary schools, (18) vocational training schools, and two teacher training institutes (one male, one female). In recent meetings with the PRT, neither PDGE Jaafar nor the PCEC were able to venture a guess as to how many students are in the province today. The number of schools operating and the number of teachers is similarly unclear, but the PDGE is focused on ascertaining the student population and the condition of all schools as well as getting a full inventory of the teaching staff before the end of November.

14. (U) There has been significant destruction of schools and considerable population shift due to the ebb and flow of operations since the last data were compiled. Estimates of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) vary but are a factor the PDGE expects will impact the numbers. Directives have been sent throughout the province instructing schoolmasters to accept any student regardless of origin, but no numbers of IDPs enrolled in school have been compiled to date.

#### High Hurdles On The Road Ahead

15. (U) It is estimated that the majority of schools in Diyala Province are in desperate need of rehabilitation or at the least emergency repairs. The results of security actions are such that that many schools are damaged beyond repair, and need to be completely rebuilt. The teaching staff reports a constant need for new textbooks and supplies. There is an uneven distribution of textbooks and supplies due to the security situation in different parts of the province. The normal number of teachers for a single school is 16. The PDGE relates that because of the lack of freedom of safe movement he has some schools with as few as four teachers and other schools reporting as many as 40 teachers present.

Administrative and custodial staff numbers are similarly skewed throughout the parts of the province that are reporting. Many schools are not reporting at all. The PDGE emphatically states that establishing security is critical, and only when teachers are free to move safely through the province to work at their assigned place of duty will the education system be able to really start reconstruction.

16. (U) In the city of Buhriz, the primary school is a good example of a school in dire need of reconstruction assistance. The school was open when a recent U.S. Army Civil Affairs Team visited, but all the windows and doors had previously been blown out as a result of CF activity that destroyed a house across the street from the school. That is a typical example of the problems that are faced here daily. The school's restrooms were inoperable, with excrement on the floors and no running water. With the help of a provincial council member whose district is Buhriz, emergency repairs were made for less than \$10,000.00. Windows, doors, and the bathrooms were repaired, and the school painted. In a small way this case depicts the issues facing the system today. The students are in school, but they need books and new desks. One school may have new books and supplies, but the windows are gone or the bathrooms are inoperable. Some schools were completely destroyed this past summer, and others were occupied by the Iraqi Army, Coalition Forces, or enemy forces. Last week the deputy PDGE reported that 11 schools are still occupied by Iraqi Army forces and asked CF support in expelling the troops.

Beyond Buildings and Books:  
Recent PRT Efforts

17. (U) Presently, coordination between PDGE Jaafar, the PCEC, and the PRT is optimal. The focus of all actions is the information exchange between the PDGE and the many CF units that are trying to

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renovate schools. The units and the PRT are now passing renovation project information to PDGE Jaafar so that he knows which schools are being renovated and can make provisions for contracting repairs on other schools. The PCEC is involved in distributing donated school supplies to schools in a fair and equitable manner. Between the stakeholders there is patchwork of good intentions that is being worked into a blanket of cohesive coverage.

18. (U) PRT efforts within the last six months have focused on building a solid relationship with PDGE Jaafar and the PCEC. This effort came to fruition during the provincial education examination process. Every day during the exams, a PRT representative met with PDGE Jaafar and coordinated the exam process with CF, Iraqi Army, and Iraqi police forces. When PDGE Jaafar was ambushed while en route to Baghdad delivering exam results, the PRT and CF rendered aid to his bodyguard who was wounded and later died, and arranged the return of his body to Baquba. That incident became the catalyst for increased trust and has made it easier to discuss issues and resolve problems. The PRT has established goals and a way forward for the PCEC. The coordination of school rehabilitation has been the major goal and the one that all involved felt could best be accomplished.

Comment

19. (SBU) The challenges facing the Educational Directorate of Diyala Province are daunting. Due to the destruction and displacement of populations in the last year the provincial schools are working under extreme stress. The groundwork laid in the last six to eight months shows great promise. PRT efforts remain focused on helping PDGE Jaafar to effectively administer his duties. Continuing PRT efforts are necessary to maintain and improve coordination with CF units, PDGE Jaafar, and the PCEC. Without a continued unified effort the provincial education system is at risk of regressing to an ad hoc firefighting effort that cannot succeed. The PRT is actively searching for additional support from educational groups and NGOs to help sustain and enhance the progress already made, but to date has had little success. End Comment.

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